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A European Museum-Cocktail around 1900

The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow

What connects the internationally known Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow with the museums in Berlin, Dresden, Vienna, and Paris? In Germany, the spontaneous answer would be: looted art. A major part of the art treasures transported out of Germany under Soviet orders – including Heinrich Schliemann's Trojan finds and the Treasure of Eberswalde – is now stored in the Pushkin Museum. At least since the 1990s, the Moscow museum has been a symbol of the most muddled chapter of Russo-German relations, the painful attempts to carry on a dialogue. The situation is paradoxical. In actuality, this renowned Russian institution, even just as a building, is the fruit of a Russo/German dialogue that could hardly have been more intense. The museum, its galleries, and the architecture itself testify to this fact, as do a whole series of letters which the founder of the museum Ivan Tsvetaev wrote to colleagues both within Russia and abroad.¹

Museum Building Boom

As so often happens, the story begins in Rome – and on a trip. Ivan Tsvetaev, a young professor of classical philology in Moscow and the author (it would be hard to think up anything more appropriate!) of a dissertation on Tacitus' *Germania*, was in Rome in the late 1880s and made the initially modest decision to expand his university's laughably small collection of plaster casts. Inspired by the academic "plaster cast cabinets", like those in Munich, Bonn, and Prague, he began collecting. Indeed, in these years, there was a veritable building boom all over Europe of new, enormous museums

¹ The correspondence between Tsvetaev and Georg Treu together with commentaries was published in 2006. Erhard Hexelschneider, Alexander Baranov, Tobias Burg (eds.), *In Moskau ein kleines Albertinum bauen. Iwan Zwetajew und Georg Treu im Briefwechsel (1881–1913)*, Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2006. The letters to the architects were published in two volumes in 1977, with commentaries. Ирина Евгеньевна Данилова, *История создания музея в переписке профессора И.В.Цветаева с архитектором Р.И.Клейном и других документах 1896–1912*, том 1 и 2, Москва: Советский художник, 1977. The letters to the patron were published in four volumes from 2008 to 2011, with commentaries. Маргарита Борисовна Аксененко, И.В.Цветаев – Ю.С.Нечаев-Мальцов. *Переписка. 1897 – 1912*, Том 1–4, Москва: Красная площадь 2008, 2010, 2010, 2011. See also Sabine Skott, *Das staatliche Museum der Bildenden Künste Alexander Puschkin 1894–1912*, Magisterarbeit, Technische Universität Berlin 2006.



Fig. 9: The Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow surrounded by scaffolding, 1905

superseding in grandeur and magnificence anything that had been achieved in the nineteenth century up to that time: around 1890, within just a few months, Prague's National Museum on Wenzel's Square, the Dresden Sculpture Collection in the Albertinum, the New Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and the two monumental, mirror-image buildings that house the Museums of Natural History and Art History in Vienna – to name just a few – were given grand openings as mighty establishments with not only the most modern exhibition technology but ambitious representative pretenses as well. In early 1892, Tsvetaev spent a whole day on his return trip from Italy to Russia in the newly opened Albertinum, one of the most exquisite plaster cast collections in Europe, and the largest as well. After his visit to Dresden, one thing was beyond question for this Russian scholar: Moscow had to have a large, public museum for the art of classical antiquity. He gave his first lecture on the subject of his museum plans in 1894 at the first pan-Russian Congress of Russian Artists and Amateurs of the Arts. Here, Tsvetaev explicitly envisioned a collection that would be systematized after the model of the Albertinum.² And, later, in the first museum guidebook of 1912, Tsvetaev expressly referred to the adoption of spatial concepts used in the Albertinum in Dresden.³

² Юдифь Матвеевна Каган, *И.В.Цветаев – Жизнь Деятельность Личность*, Москва: Наука, 1987, p. 95.

³ *Музей изящных искусств имени императора Александра III в Москве краткий иллюстрированный Путеводитель*, часть I, 1912, p. IX.

In the 1890s in Moscow, the mood was extremely advantageous for the founding of a new museum. Monumental museums as places of national affirmation belonged to the standard repertoire of every capital city of world renown at the end of the nineteenth century, and the Moscow public quickly warmed up to the idea. Thus, Tsvetaev confidently wrote to his colleague Georg Treu, director of the Albertinum in Dresden: “I have started rousing the public here as to the importance of a museum for the art of classical antiquity at the Imperial Moscow University. The issue has pleased a great number of people and some monetary donations have already been made.”⁴ He wrote these optimistic words to his Dresden colleague in Russian. This was to be the beginning of a twenty-year-long, intensive exchange of letters that was pervaded by an obsessive, and quite practical, question: how to build a museum out of nothing? (fig. 9)

How to Build a Museum out of Nothing?

Money, light, heat, a building, and a collection: these were the prerequisites in Moscow. And, furthermore, as Tsvetaev remarked in an early letter, “the participation of European scholars.”⁵ Only one of these aspects was tackled in an outspokenly Russian manner: the question of financing. In contrast to the other European museums of that time, the Moscow museum was, almost without exception, privately funded by the Russian bourgeoisie. The ultra-rich industrialist Yury Nechaev-Maltsov, namely, took over almost the total cost of construction from beginning to end (!) and thus provided an impressive example of the amazing potency of cultural patronage in tsarist Russia prior to and even for some years after the revolutionary upheavals of 1905.⁶ After taking a stroll through the landscaped exterior on the Berlin Museum Island in June of 1899, Tsvetaev wrote to Nechaev-Maltsov: “You are the one who has made it possible for us to dream and imagine, to come up with the boldest of ideas. And with what simplicity and ease you are lifting us to the heights of founding a state museum in Europe.”⁷ The Moscow museum aspired to be and was intended to be on a par with the other European museum buildings of the time. A little more than one

4 Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, March 1/13, 1893 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 100.

5 Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, March 15/27, 1893 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 107.

6 A Russian television documentary of 2012 on the occasion of the centenary of the opening of the museum reported that two-thirds of the construction costs were covered by Yury Nechaev-Maltsov alone. Film by Леонид Парфёнов, *Глаз Божий*, at: <http://parfenov-l.livejournal.com/45581.html> (accessed January 21, 2013). See Skott 2006 (as fn. 1); Waltraud Bayer, *Die Moskauer Medici. Der russische Bürger als Mäzen 1850–1917*, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag 1996.

7 Letter from Tsvetaev to Nechaev-Maltsov, June 8, 1899 in: Bénédicte Savoy, Philippa Sissis (eds.), *Die Berliner Museumsinsel. Impressionen internationaler Besucher (1830–1990)*, Cologne: Böhlau Verlag 2012, p. 133.

year later, on the day of the official opening of the museum (1912), Tsvetaev reported with palpable satisfaction: “Happily, the museum was opened without one kopek’s worth of debt. We have completely repaid all of Europe.”⁸

Whereas the financing of the museum remained completely Russian all the way through to the successful opening of the museum, other issues – ranging from the conception of the collection, over acquisition strategies and gallery presentation, to the exterior appearance of the museum – were dealt with by mail between Moscow and the various European capitals, in reciprocal exchange and lively dialogue. Ample evidence of this interchange can be found in the recently published Russo-German edition of the correspondence between the Moscow founding director Ivan Tsvetaev and his Dresden colleague Georg Treu.⁹ Tsvetaev’s intensive study of European museum buildings is, however, also reflected in letters which he wrote to colleagues within Russia – the correspondence has recently been published by the Pushkin Museum, which has the letters in its archives.¹⁰ In the more than 800 letters to Nechaev-Maltsov, Tsvetaev explains the various European architectural models and types of collections, many of which, in the end, left their imprint on the museum in Moscow.¹¹ Furthermore, the 260 letters Tsvetaev wrote to his architect – published in 1977 – contain detailed documentation of the construction work and the planning of the museum.¹² This valuable source material, furnished with detailed commentaries by the archival staff, makes possible a reconstruction of the synthesis of the Moscow museum out of the European museum buildings and collections of the time. At the same time, this internal, Russian turn-of-the-century correspondence makes clear that the main models for Tsvetaev’s ideas in respect to the museum’s collection, architecture, and its general aura were the museums in Berlin and Dresden.

Circulations

Dresden, then, played a special role: “Most esteemed Yegor Yegorovich...” From 1881 until his death in 1913, Tsvetaev wrote untiringly long letters to his colleague Treu,

⁸ Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, June 14, 1912 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 296.

⁹ Of the correspondence between Tsvetaev and Treu, 125 letters have survived. Эрхард Хексельшнейдер, Семья Цветаевых и Дрезден, in: Ирина Юрьевна Белякова (eds.), *Семья Цветаевых в истории и культуре России, XV Международная научно-тематическая конференция, 8–11 октября 2007*, Москва: Дом-музей Марины Цветаевой, 2008, pp. 13–31. Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1).

¹⁰ Аксененко (Том 1–4) 2008–2011 (as fn. 1).

¹¹ Аксененко (Том 1) 2008 (as fn. 1), p. 62.

¹² Данилова (Том 1 и 2) 1977 (as fn. 1).

inquiring about the best addresses in Europe for ordering plaster casts and galvanoplastic reproductions, about the heights and widths of galleries for his museum, about glass facades and skylights, styles of ceilings and types of marble, about floors, orders of columns, pedestals, about “measures that can be taken to protect the plaster casts against dirt and dust,”¹³ and much more. And week for week, year for year, for two decades, Treu faithfully answered these missives from Moscow, comprehensively and with precision (fig. 10). He warned, for example, against the plaster casts of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (“we have had the nastiest of experiences”),¹⁴ recommended moveable cross walls and wood paneling rather than masonry and stucco in the galleries in order to make changes possible whenever necessary, and in general he advocated flexibility and comfort in a museum. His advice extended into the smallest of details: “Rather than placing modern sphinxes at the doors, I would get copies of ancient Egyptian sphinxes or even better, copies of the two magnificent lions from the Vatican. [...] That would be the best invitation to your cast collection.”¹⁵ A distinct symbol for the Russo-German, actually pan-European, origin of the Moscow museum was provided by the splendid decorative frieze that was mounted a few months before completion of the building at a height of ten meters along the outer colonnade: a relief, a free rendition of the Parthenon frieze of the British Museum, created with the help of casts at the Albertinum and hewed out of Tyrolean marble by a German artist in Dresden. The frieze along the main façade of the Pushkin Museum is the work of Leopold Armbruster.¹⁶ The Dresden sculptor, who also carried out the frieze on the Albertinum, was recommended to Moscow by Georg Treu and, in 1902, was commissioned¹⁷ to copy the Parthenon frieze at the British Museum and to supplement it in marble.¹⁸ The Parthenon frieze thus exists twice in the museum, once inside as a plaster cast¹⁹ together with the chronologically corresponding works in Gallery 7, and again as a decoration, reproduced in marble, on the façade. Athens in Moscow, via London, Saxony, and the Vinschgau Valley – the transnational character of this national museum founding could hardly be portrayed more palpably.

Tsvetaev asked to be sent exact photographs of the spatial situation from various European museums, requested scholarly publications on the room décor of Classical

¹³ Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, June 17, 1895 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 162.

¹⁴ Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, April 13, 1893 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 108.

¹⁵ Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, October 10, 1897 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 172.

¹⁶ Armbruster's invoice for Moscow in the archive of the Pushkin Museum: ГМИИ Фонд № 2 опись 1 дело 252.

¹⁷ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, October 12, 1902 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 116.

¹⁸ Letters from Treu to Tsvetaev, September 25, 1902 and Treu to Klein, August 1, 1904 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), pp. 192–194, 215–217. Details on procuring the marble from Austria in the letters from Kühnert to Tsvetaev, August 7, 1904 and August 25, 1904. Archive of the Pushkin Museum: ГМИИ Фонд № 2 опись 1 дело 69.

¹⁹ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, September 15, 1900 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 102.

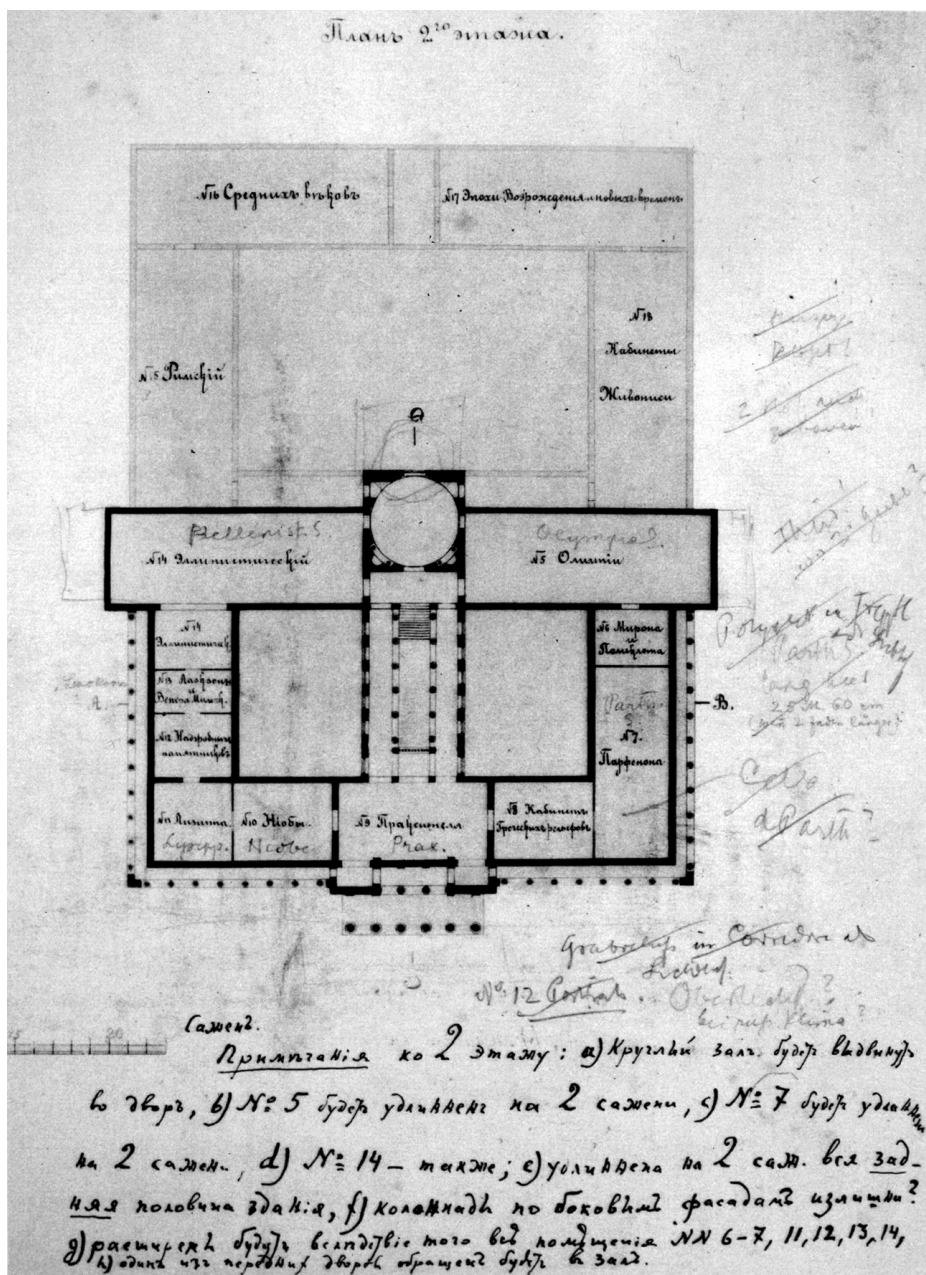


Fig. 10: Ground-plan of the top floor with inscriptions by Ivan Tsvetaev and Georg Treu (pencil)

Antiquity, and had dozens of casts made for his collection. As a result, some of his exhibition galleries in Moscow were almost twin copies of various European galleries. Nor did Tsvetaev ever tire of calling his sugar-white, gigantic, Ural marble building on Volkhonka Street the “little Albertinum” and, gratefully, the “son” of the museum in Dresden. That such formulations were purely expressions of gratitude and that the Moscow museum is by no means a “little Albertinum” is clear even from reading between the lines of the Treu/Tsvetaev correspondence. It quickly becomes obvious that Tsvetaev had close professional contacts not only with Dresden but with half of Europe, and that his correspondents were situated in the museums of Vienna, London, Berlin, and Budapest.²⁰ He gives accounts, for example, of study trips that took him and his architect Roman Klein to the most important museums in Europe. He reports on well-intentioned advice from Berlin, heady inspiration from Florence, and good museum catalogues from the United States: “The Americans, he writes full of admiration in 1893, are in this regard, too, people with a lot of verve. That’s one country – the world’s most powerful – that you won’t outshine!”²¹

Adoption and Adaptation of Western European Models

Though it was clear to the founders in Moscow that there would “only” be one building for the collection of teaching materials for the Moscow University, their aspirations were high: “Most esteemed Ivan Vladimirovich, since the year 1896 we have been working on transforming a storage house for plaster casts into a temple of art,” wrote the architect Roman Klein to Tsvetaev in 1902.²² With this in mind, Klein had already been sent in early 1897 on a long journey abroad, to study the museums in Germany, France, England, and Italy in respect to their facades, ground plans, and technological equipment.²³ Tsvetaev initially had wanted to have an exact historical copy of a Greek temple for his Moscow museum.²⁴ In the different correspondences it becomes clear that, for the exterior of the museum, he only wanted to copy traditional Greek architectural elements. The outside appearance of the museum – the protuberances on the façade and the Ionic order of columns – was based on the small temple of Nike Apteros near the Propylaea on the Acropolis.²⁵ That Tsvetaev gave preference

²⁰ Данилова (Том 1 и. 2) 1977 (as fn. 1).

²¹ Letter from Tsvetaev to Treu, March 15, 1893 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 106.

²² Translated from: letter from Klein to Tsvetaev, December 23, 1902 in: Данилова (Том 2) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 90.

²³ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, April 25, 1897 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 31.

²⁴ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, August 7, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁵ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, December 18, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 50.

to the Ionic order had to do with his opinion that Corinthian columns had been used far too frequently in Russia. “Corinthian columns are commonplace in Russia and have become boring.”²⁶ Furthermore, Tsvetaev did not know of any buildings in the Greek style which had a second story, so he urged that they do without one, discussing the issue with specialists in Munich and Stuttgart, among others.²⁷ As a compromise, they agreed upon a windowless second floor, which was supposed to disguise the fact that more than one floor existed. The result was a top floor which offered the opportunity for overhead lighting. According to Tsvetaev, the inspiration to use skylights in the upper galleries came to him in his visit to the British Museum and the National Gallery in London, whereby the steep roof construction was an accommodation to Moscow weather conditions.²⁸ In general, the planning and design of the interior was an intensive adoption and adaptation of Western European models.

As in the case of the façade, Tsvetaev acquired precise information for every single room of his museum, examining corresponding rooms in the great Western European museums, studying the models carefully, and explicitly taking over – often without a single change – whole orderings of rooms, interior decoration ideas, and furnishings, creating a curious synthesis of all of these in Moscow. Mentioned below are a few examples, all of which actually deserve a more detailed description than is possible in this context.²⁹

Based on Tsvetaev’s correspondence with his architect and with the director of the Dresden Albertinum, for example, it has been clearly ascertained that the Olympic Gallery in Moscow is based on the eponymous gallery in Dresden.³⁰ Klein was not only sent by Tsvetaev to Dresden especially for the purpose of studying the gable figures in the Dresden Olympic Gallery and to take the measurements of the gable, but also to do a careful reading of Treu’s publications.³¹ For the Assyrian Gallery in Moscow, Tsvetaev and his team followed Parisian models: in 1888 in the Louvre, namely, three rooms for Assyrian art had opened, the Salle Sarzec as well as the “*grande*” and the “*petite*” *salles de Suse*.³² The Moscow architect was supposed to base his design on these Parisian galleries and, in this case too, study the most up-to-date literature

²⁶ Translated from: letters from Tsvetaev to Klein, July 25, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁷ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, April 22, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 29; letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, June 3, 1897 in: *ibid.*, pp. 34, 35.

²⁸ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, July 1 and July 27, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 36, 41.

²⁹ Skott 2006 (as fn. 1), pp. 28–63.

³⁰ Letter from Treu to Tsvetaev, January 2, 1908 in: Hexelschneider 2006 (as fn. 1), p. 248.

³¹ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, June 3, 1897 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 36; letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, May 28, 1897 in: *ibid.*, p. 33; Letters from Tsvetaev to Klein, December 26, 1907 and August 5, 1908 in: *ibid.*, pp. 244, 260.

³² Genevieve Bresc-Bautier, *The Architecture of the Louvre*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1995, p. 178.

on the subject:³³ “You must become familiar with the corresponding galleries in the Louvre,” wrote Tsvetaev. “There you will find two rooms designed in the Assyrian and the ancient Persian style (on the third floor!), carried out like nowhere else in the world by the best connoisseurs of Assyrian antiquity.”³⁴ The Gallery of the Aeginites, for which inspiration was taken from Munich, Strasbourg, and Berlin, resulted in a fusion of the three models: the gable sculptures from the Temple of Aphaia³⁵ in Aegina were set up, with but minor adjustments, according to Bertel Thorvaldsen’s suggestions for the Munich Glyptothek.³⁶ However, since the room was not broad enough, the sculptures were placed closer together than in Munich, as was the case for the figures in the plaster cast museum at the Institute for Art and Archaeology at the Kaiser Wilhelm University in Strasbourg, today’s Gypsothèque de l’Université de Strasbourg.³⁷ Further, Tsvetaev demanded that his architect look to the Neues Museum in Berlin for the design of the gable.³⁸ Another example of such fusion and remixing of different gallery conceptions from the museums of Western Europe is the Egyptian Gallery of the Moscow museum: here, the columns are exactly the same as those in the Egyptian gallery in the art historical museum in Vienna; the starry sky-ceiling comes from Berlin’s Neues Museum and the partitions from the Louvre.³⁹ And, when it came time to design the Gallery of Early Christian and Medieval Art, Tsvetaev spent five weeks on the second floor of the recently opened Kaiser Friedrich Museum (today’s Bode Museum) in Berlin in order to study the arrangements in the section for Christian sculpture: “In the summer of this year, I spent more than five weeks in Berlin, and worked in your museum [Bode Museum], in the Christian sculpture department.”⁴⁰ The list of further examples is endless...

In final measure, with the help of Ivan Tsvetaev’s letters, almost every single detail of the interior design and the architecture of the museum can be traced back to some European model. Even when Tsvetaev explicitly named some museums as being models for certain rooms, he always allowed elements from other collections

33 Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, March 4, 1904 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), pp. 147, 148. Named as literature necessary for the designing of the Assyrian galleries were: Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, *Historie de l’art dans l’antiquité*, Paris 1882.

34 Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, March 26, 1905 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 181.

35 In the museum guide, it is called the Temple of Athena. Краткий Путеводитель с иллюстрациями, часть I, Москва 1917, p. 76.

36 On the reconstruction and presentation in Munich, see Raimund Wünsche, *Glyptothek München*, Munich: C.H. Beck 2005, pp. 182–185.

37 Данилова, том II, Москва 1977, p. 133.

38 Letters from Tsvetaev to Klein, October 14, 1903, July 17, 1908, and August 5, 1908 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), pp. 144, 255, 260.

39 Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, July 18, 1903 in: *ibid.*, p. 135.

40 Letter from Tsvetaev to Bode, August 25/September 6, 1899. Zentralarchiv der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin (SMB-ZA), NL Bode 1374.

to flow into his Moscow designs. It would be no exaggeration to view the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, for the time around 1900, as one of the most exciting – and most unrecognized – syntheses of modern museum design in all of Europe.

Impress the World

But that is not all. The fact is that the unusual lyricism of this imposing institution does not reveal itself until you actually pace through these galleries, even today. You step into an enormous, glass-covered hall with terraces and vista points, the so-called “Greek courtyard,” where antique architectural fragments of purest white plaster are positioned at odd angles in surrealistically close proximity to one another – monumental exterior spaces enclosed within museum walls: a corner of the Parthenon, life-sized (around 1900, this corner existed only in Paris, not in one other museum of the world), the Porch of the Caryatids from the Ionian Erechtheion, the Corinthian Monument of Lysicrates, a bull’s head capital from Persepolis, “all the *chefs d’oeuvre* of Greek sculpture and other awkwardly shaped objects,” as Tsvetaev once formulated it.⁴¹ With a courtyard like this, modeled after the *Cour Vitrée* of the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, Tsvetaev saw the possibility of installing in the museum monumental casts of architectural details in their original sizes. Klein was commissioned to study the atrium in the Paris Academy of Fine Arts: “The idea for a *Cour Vitrée* for our museum met with general approval. So go ahead with the plans for the atrium, do not postpone it, and let it be of imposing dimensions, since there must be room for all of the *chefs d’oeuvre* of Greek sculpture and the awkwardly shaped objects [...], like the corner of the Parthenon in its original size (think of the École des Beaux Arts).”⁴² Tsvetaev was extremely enthusiastic about the atrium, and surely the fact that such a terrace-like courtyard “was not to be found in this unique form in any other museum” was not the least of his interest.⁴³ His vision was for the museum in Moscow to impress the world, and he would achieve the desired effect, it must be said, through effective staging – consistently carried out through the whole museum: “Stucco the walls with artificial marble,” wrote Tsvetaev to his architect in 1903. “We should mix some yellow tones into the powder or the paste. A white gallery and a white courtyard for white plaster casts is impossible, and is not to be found in a single museum.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, April 7, 1897 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 25.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Translated from: И.В.Цветаев, Записка, Москва 1908 in: Данилова (Том 2) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 20

⁴⁴ Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, March 1, 1905 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 177.

The Greek Courtyard was symmetrically paired with a peculiar replication of the Bargello Courtyard in Florence. Basically a one to one copy, it is at the same time a simplification, since the walls are hung with sandstone plates⁴⁵ to protect against the danger, according to Tsvetaev, of soiling from “students’ boots.”⁴⁶ This was the so-called “Christian Courtyard.” Today, Michelangelo’s David stands in front of the Golden Gates of the Saxon Freiberg Cathedral, and Colloni’s equestrian statue is not far from the choir stalls from the Ulm Cathedral.⁴⁷ Everything made of plaster, everything fake. And, at the entranceways into the galleries, Tsvetaev used copies of church portals – inspired by those he had seen in the recently opened Musée du Trocadéro in Paris. Since 1882, this museum arranged by Viollet-le-Duc had displayed Gothic church portals, frescoes, and capitals – without exception French patrimony – in the original size but out of plaster.⁴⁸ Tsvetaev wanted this for his museum as well.

Transnational Space for National Affirmation

Included in this Western museum synthesis in Moscow are of course, needless to say, elements of Russian representative architecture that make the museum a prime example of national affirmation through transnational means. This is especially obvious in the main stairway of the museum and the so-called Hall of Fame:⁴⁹ the stairs have a representative character that has more in common with a palace than a museum and are an indication of the origin of museum buildings as architectonic representatives of the power and wealth of a state. Although, according to Tsvetaev, the stairway is a “colossal Greek-Roman-Italian hodgepodge that would never hold up to scholarly criticism,”⁵⁰ he finally did come to terms with the “Ionic, if not purely Greek

45 Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, March 1, 1905 in: *ibid.*

46 Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, August 7, 1899 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 86.

47 Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, September 1, 1910 in: *ibid.*, p. 298.

48 See Susanne Mersmann, *Die Musées du Trocadéro: Viollet-le-Duc und der Kanondiskurs im Paris des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: Reimer, 2012; Schreiter, Charlotte, *Antike um jeden Preis. Gipsabgüsse und Kopien antiker Plastik in Mitteldeutschland am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012; Charlotte Schreiter (ed.), *Gipsabgüsse und antike Skulpturen. Präsentation und Kontext*, Berlin: Reimer, 2012. Purely plaster cast collections that called themselves museums were, in Paris, the Musée des Monuments Français, in the United States in Cambridge, Ma., the Germanisches Museum, today named Busch-Reisinger Museum. The collections were founded for the purpose of constructing national cultural monuments. Frank Matthias Kammel, *Der Gipsabguss- vom Medium der ästhetischen Norm zur toten Konserve der Kunstgeschichte*, in: Andrea M. Kluxen (ed.), *Ästhetische Probleme der Plastik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Nuremberg: Aleph, 2001, p. 52.

49 Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, January 27, 1899 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), pp. 76, 77.

50 Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, June 23, 1907 in: *ibid.*, p. 234.

staircase.”⁵¹ Designed by William Craft Brumfield, the stairs are the most imposing Neo-Classical creation existing in Russia and clearly show the influence of the New Hermitage by Leo von Klenze in Saint Petersburg.⁵² The main gallery, planned as a Hall of Fame in the style of an early Christian basilica (as was also planned for the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin),⁵³ was meant to be proof of both the national orientation within Russia and the indirect dependence of the museum on the tsar’s favor.⁵⁴ It is precisely this tension between national ambitions for the museum and the transnational paths of museum design that is the point with this museum. Here we can experience how museum models and spatial fictions develop that transcend national borders, how they circulate, gain acceptance, and are adapted, how they set standards – or not, and all of this far from any grand theories or state museum pathos.

In the year of its opening, 1912, the Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow was far, far more than a comprehensive and well-assorted plaster cast collection in the sense of the noble Albertinum. In its ideals, it was very close to the most up-to-date architecture museums in the world, such as the Musée des Monuments Français by Viollet-le-Duc in the Paris Trocadéro, which had reopened in autumn 2007, the Albertinum in Dresden (opened 1891), the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin (opened 1904), and many more. Conceptually, the Moscow museum furthermore points beyond its time to the sensational and not unproblematic museum designs of the early twentieth century, for example the Berlin Museum Island and the audacious reconstruction of the Pergamon Altar, the Market Gate of Miletus, and the Processional Way and Ishtar Gate of Babylon in the Pergamon Museum – in all of these, however, not plaster but the original objects of Classical Antiquity. It is against this background that the editions of the letter exchanges – between Treu and Tsvetaev on the one hand, between Tsvetaev and his architect Klein on the other hand, and between Tsvetaev and the patron of the Moscow museum, to whom he regularly sent reports about the progress of their work – unfold their full potential for research and discovery. They are not only both the fruits of and the sources for German-French-Italian-Russian cultural transfer research, not only a renewed testimony to the advantages of transnational history writing devoted to the dynamics of exchange and the mechanisms of interweaving. These exchanges of letters are, beyond all this, among the most interesting source materials for museum history that have been brought to light in recent years.

Translated by Catherine Framm

⁵¹ Translated from: letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, December 29, 1905 in: *ibid.*, p. 198.

⁵² William Craft Brumfield, *A History of Russian Architecture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 443.

⁵³ Letter from Tsvetaev to Klein, March 19, 1902 in: Данилова (Том 1) 1977 (as fn. 1), p. 106.

⁵⁴ Tsvetaev’s diary, March 12, 1898 in: Александра Андреевна Демская, Людмила Михайловна Смирнова, *И.В.Цветаев Создает Музей*, Москва: Галарт, 1995, pp. 87–88.